WORKERS VANGUARD

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# Make the Fight Against Esencia an Anti-Imperialist Fight

Esencia, the multi-billion-dollar hotel project that promises economic growth, new housing and development, is being pushed as progress by developers and the government. But the building of 1,000 luxury residences, which will cost between $2 million and $20 million, and five expensive hotels will cut Puerto Ricans off from land they have used for generations and remove them from their homes. So, who is this "progress" really for?

Behind the project are the Reuben brothers and the Puerto Rican government, which has approved massive tax credits to ensure the hotel development happens. The Boricua masses know this isn't progress for them, but for rich, white foreigners. They correctly see this as a threat to their existence. That's because it's not just a series of hotels being built but an airfield, healthcare center and a private bilingual K-12 school, with the project set to eat up 2,000 acres of land. It's a luxury community that excludes Puerto Ricans!

The Boricua masses are angry and want to stop Esencia. It's why thousands marched in Old San Juan on March 28, demanding: "¡Esencia No Va!" Puerto Ricans have the right to say no to this project. But how can we stop this colonial adventure? The march was important, but it also showed the lack of a real strategy to fight back. Much of the protest called for "JGo out!" Yes, González and the rest of the PNP, along with the PPD, are a threat to Puerto Rico. However, calling for JGo out but not the foreign capitalists and imperialists she serves is just calling for another puppet to take her place. This would do nothing to change the status quo. Parties like the PIP and the MVC thrive on popular sentiment against González, but they have no real solution to the Esencia threat. They have no strategy to get JGo and her bosses out either.

For example, while the MVC opposes Esencia, they support a proposal pushed by academics at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Puerto Rico. The proposal calls on the government to reconsider the plans for the project and use "rigorous scientific criteria, ecological justice and citizens' participation" to remedy the current construction plans, which are going to destroy the ecosystem and displace Boricuas. But this is asking a government that's tied to imperialism and foreign capital by a thousand strings to act in the interest of Puerto Ricans and not their true masters. This isn't a basis to stop Esencia. The government and developers will not make the project better for Boricuas because Esencia is not for Boricuas. It is for the rich vultures looking to sink their claws into the island at the expense of the Puerto Rican masses.

Advising the government on how to make Esencia a better project is a losing strategy. Esencia doesn't need to be made better. It needs to be stopped. It will be a disaster for Puerto Rico on many levels. The imperialists control everything on the island, taking what they want while the Boricua masses have no say in their daily lives. Esencia is just another example of a land grab by the colonial masters. If they are not stopped, they will take more. This is why, to successfully fight Esencia, the Puerto Rican left must link the movement against the project to the struggle for independence.

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The MVC cannot do this because they refuse to take a clear position on Puerto Rican independence. Lacking a stance against colonial subjugation, the MVC can only push liberal methods like trying to convince the imperialists to be kinder to the environment and Boricuas. This will just lead to the working class and oppressed in Borikén getting screwed over. Part of the fight against Esencia is to oppose liberal strategies and show how groups like the MVC have no plan to get the masses out of this mess.

The conditions in Puerto Rico are deteriorating. Housing is hard to find, and wages are kept down as homelessness rises. With U.S. imperialism being more brutal under the Trump administration, it is even more urgent that Puerto Ricans organize a fight that ties stopping Esencia to throwing the imperialists out. The first step is to get the organized working class involved. Of course, there were workers who took part in the Pa'la Calle Contra Esencia, but the unions were not present as a force—just like they weren't organized in the pro-independence march back in August 2025. To get workers out as an organized unit, it is necessary to show how this project will directly affect them.

The Esencia project is going to throw many Puerto Rican workers out of their homes, forcing them into neighboring areas which are already hurting from a lack of resources. This will create more pressure, crime and overall chaos. Working-class Puerto Ricans will also see rents rise in neighboring areas, because local landlords will want to cash in on what Esencia will bring them. The Boricua working class and oppressed masses already have a hard time paying rent. Any increase will result in mass evictions, adding to the homeless problem.

The developers say that Esencia will create jobs for Puerto Ricans. They act like they are providing the masses with a great gift when in fact they are setting up Boricuas to be brutally exploited and ground down. If they are successful in building the luxury community, the owners will only hire workers at the lowest wages and without the possibility of unionizing. This is the current condition of hotel workers throughout Puerto Rico. The government and U.S. imperialism have made Borikén a haven for foreign capitalists to make massive profits through tax breaks and promises of a low-wage workforce.

It's already extremely difficult to survive on these hotel jobs, and most industries in Puerto Rico are low-wage and non-union. Having more Boricua workers toiling for miserable pay with no union protection will only continue to bring down the conditions of the working class as a whole. It's a similar situation for workers on surrounding Caribbean islands, where the U.S. and other imperialists have crushed economies. This devastation has forced these tiny nations to depend on tourism, while the local rulers entice foreign capitalists with tax cuts and by driving down labor standards. No matter what the developers say, they will not bring "progress" to Puerto Rico because the whole purpose of having foreign capitalists come in is to extract what they can and leave the masses with crumbs. They are enemies of progress, not the makers of it.

If there is no serious fight against Esencia, other capitalists and imperialists will continue the trend of mega-hotel projects that will eventually eat up more and more of Borikén. This will tighten the grip of the U.S. and its partners and keep Boricua workers as low-wage colonial slaves to serve them. The result will be many more people leaving the island, a problem already plaguing the nation. Does Puerto Rico need decent jobs and development? Yes, but those things will never come by complying with the very force keeping the island down. The Boricua working class will only get these things when it struggles against those keeping it subjugated. How to do this? There needs to be a movement that looks to organize all workers of all industries controlled by the colonial masters. This movement must fight to strengthen the unions where they exist and throw out the imperialist bosses. This fight can start with Cabo Rojo, but it will not succeed if it is not based on an anti-imperialist strategy.


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